

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Assignment - Comprehension - Zheng He

1 Zheng He, formerly translated as Cheng Ho, was a Muslim  
Chinese explorer, diplomat, mariner and fleet admiral. He  
commanded voyages to Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle  
East, Somalia and the Swahili coast, collectively referred to as the  
5 “Voyages of Zheng He” from 1405 to 1433.

Zheng, born as Ma He, was the second son of a Muslim family  
from Yunnan. He was the great great great grandson of a Persian  
who served in the administration of the Mongolian Empire and was  
10 appointed governor of Yunnan during the early Yuan Dynasty.

In 1381, the year his father was killed, following the defeat of the  
Yuan by new Ming dynasty. Ma He, then only eleven years old, was  
captured by the Ming troops and made a eunuch. He was sent to  
15 the court of one of the emperor’s son, Zhu Di the Prince of Yan,  
where he was called San Bao meaning ‘Three Jewels.’ The young  
eunuch eventually became a trusted adviser of the Prince of Yan,  
and assisted the prince in to become the Emperor. For his valour in  
this war, the eunuch received the name Zheng He from his master.

20 Zheng He continued serving Zhu Di in his court as a Eunuch Grand  
Director. It was during this era that Zheng He, with the rank of Chief  
Envoy carried out the first of his six overseas missions.

The Yongle emperor (Zhu Di) designed the missions to establish  
25 and extend China’s power over the Indian Ocean basin. He wanted  
to control over trade and impress foreign peoples in the region.  
Zheng He was placed as the admiral in control of the huge fleet  
and armed forces that undertook these expeditions. Zheng He’s  
first voyage, which departed July 11, 1405, from Suzhou, consisted  
30 of a fleet of 317 ships holding almost 28,000 crewmen (each ship  
housing up to 500 men).



1 Zheng He's fleets visited Arabia, Brunei, the Horn of Africa, India,  
Southeast Asia and Thailand. Zheng He presented gifts of gold,  
silver, porcelain and silk; in return, China received such novelties  
as ostriches, zebras, camels, ivory and a giraffe from the Swahili.  
5 To achieve his goals of extending Chinese power, Zheng generally  
used diplomacy. His large army awed most would-be enemies into  
submission. It was reported that Zheng He "walked like a tiger" and  
did not shrink from violence when he considered it necessary to  
impress foreign peoples with China's military might. He ruthlessly  
10 suppressed pirates who had long plagued Chinese and southeast  
Asian waters. He also waged a land war against the Kingdom of  
Kotte in Ceylon. From his fourth voyage, he brought envoys from  
thirty states who traveled to China and paid their respects at the  
Ming court.

15 While Zheng He's fleet was unprecedented, the routes were not.  
Zheng He's fleet was following long-established, well-mapped  
routes. Sea-based trade links had existed between China and the  
Arabian peninsula since earlier times, all the way to East Africa.

20 In 1430 Yongle's grandson, the Xuande Emperor appointed Zheng  
He to lead the seventh and final expedition to the "Western Ocean".  
It is commonly believed that Zheng He died during the treasure  
fleet's last voyage, on the returning trip. Although he has a tomb in  
25 China, it is empty: he was, like many great admirals, buried at sea.

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1. What are the other two names Zheng He had?

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2. Why was Zheng He's great great great grandfather appointed as governor of Yunnan?

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3. Why was Zheng He's father killed by the Ming troops?

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4. What does it mean by 'valour' as in the Paragraph 3?

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5. What did Yongle want to achieve with the voyages?

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6. Why do you think the report said that Zheng He 'walked like a tiger'?

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7. What do you think the Chinese thought of that animals such as ostriches and zebras were considered 'novelties'?

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8. What two things did Zheng He do to exert Chinese military might?

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9. What is the meaning of 'unprecedented' in Paragraph 6?

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10. Why do you think that great admirals were buried at sea?

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Title: Assignment Answers - Comprehension - Zheng He

1. Ma He and San Bao.

2. They were from Yunnan.

3. He was probably a member of the Yunnan government.

4. It means 'bravery'.

5. Yongle wanted to establish and extend China's power over the Indian Ocean basin; he wanted to control over the trade; and he wanted to impress foreign peoples. (any 2)

6. The report wanted to emphasise that he was ready to use violence to solve problems, just like a tiger.

7. They had never seen such animals before.

8. He captured pirates and even waged a land war against the Kingdom of Kotte in Ceylon.

9. It means that it has never been done before.

10. Because great admirals spent most of their careers at sea, so it was natural that they would also spend their death at sea as well.



